

Dental Care for the Expecting Mom

For those of you who may be expecting shortly or have been through a pregnancy in the past, you may be aware of the many precautionary measures that must be taken during pregnancy for the health of your baby. Many of these same precautionary steps must be followed and considerations made to ensure the safety and comfort of the expecting mother and her baby while visiting the dentist.

When it comes to dental care for the pregnant patient, timing is everything. If you are considering getting pregnant, the best time to have a check up or to have your dental care completed is right now, before you actually become pregnant. A healthy mouth before you are pregnant will help ensure a less chance of emergency care during your term. Routine dental care such as fillings and cleanings are best held off until after delivery. This is because of the vulnerability of the growing fetus in the first 3 months or trimester and the comfort level of the mother in the last trimester. The second trimester is considered the safest time to have dental work done but is best if delayed until after delivery. Third trimester dental care is best postponed due to the comfort level of the patient and to avoid **Supine Hypotension Syndrome**. This is a compression of the large vein in the abdomen, the **Inferior Vena Cava**, which brings blood back to the heart. Unfortunately, lying on your back in the dental chair can cause this compression. Also, there is always the risk of the patient going into labor and dentists are not very good at delivering babies. Emergency dental care can be done at any time. It is better to remove an infected tooth for example than leave a source of infection for the mother and fetus.

Other important dental considerations include dental radiographs and drugs that are administered. **Dental radiographs or X-rays** are not used for routine dental care and it's always important to notify the x-ray technician if you are pregnant or think you might be. In emergency situations X-rays may be needed to diagnose a problem, however proper safety measures will be taken. These measures include the lead apron, reduced radiation and the x-ray beam position. This again is most important in the first trimester. We must also modify drugs that can be administered to the pregnant or breast feeding patient. Certain anesthetics, pain relievers, antibiotics, and sedative drugs that may be used are considered unsafe for the developing fetus and must be avoided. For breast-feeding mothers there is concern over certain drugs that may be absorbed into the mother's milk. The local anesthetic that we use is considered safe for emergent dental care needs.

One of the most common oral complications seen with pregnant women is called **pregnancy gingivitis**. This condition presents as fiery red swollen gums. It usually begins in the second month of pregnancy and progresses throughout the pregnancy. It is the result of an exaggerated inflammatory response of the gums to bacteria, plaque and calculus in the mouth, due to an increase of estrogen and progesterone hormones in the pregnant woman. With pregnancy gingivitis, like regular gingivitis, the gum tissue may bleed more easily than normal. After pregnancy these conditions should return to normal

with proper oral hygiene. One recent study through the University of Alabama found that individuals who have **severe or generalized periodontitis** were seven times more likely to have preterm and low birth weight babies than those with healthy gums. One fallacy that some may have heard is that being pregnant will lead to having “soft teeth”. While calcium is pulled from the mother’s bones during pregnancy it is not the case for the teeth. More likely than not an increase in cavities after pregnancy is usually brought about by a change in dietary and home care habits.

If you are thinking about a little one in the near future we highly recommend making sure all your dental work is up to date. This will greatly decrease any chances you will need to visit us during your pregnancy. The best measure that the pregnant women can take is **prevention**. This consists of diligent brushing and flossing to remove plaque from the teeth and gums along with annual dental check ups and cleanings. By maintaining a healthy oral environment you can minimize the need for emergency dental treatment during your pregnancy.